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NAVY LEAGUES.

BY LIEUTENANT-COMMANDER J. H. GIBBONS, U. S. N.

THE recent organization of a Navy League in the State of New York is the beginning of a movement that ought to arouse enthusiasm throughout the United States, and bring to the aid of the navy a stronger public opinion. Our political organization is such that the centres of effort can be uniformly distributed over a large geographical area, from town to district, from district to State, and from State to nation, until, by a gradual process of education, our people will be able to formulate intelligently, forcibly and patriotically such measures as are needed to secure an adequate navy. Lord Salisbury, while Prime Minister of England, made the statement that the defence of a country is not the business of the government but of the people themselves. If this theory be true, we may reasonably suppose that, when the people of the United States make the navy a part of their daily business and cease to regard it as a valuable asset only in time of panic, Congress, in its wisdom, will record their will in the form of necessary laws.

The first Navy League was established in England in 1894. Its general aims, as set forth in the constitution, are, (1) to spread information showing the vital importance to the British Empire of the naval supremacy upon which depend its trade, dominion, and national existence; (2) to call attention to the enormous demands which war would make upon the navy and to the fact that the navy is not strong enough to meet them, and at all times to point out any shortcomings in this respect; (3) to call attention, from time to time, to such measures as may be requisite to secure adequate preparation for the maritime defence of the Empire; (4) to urge these matters on public men and, in

particular, upon candidates for Parliament, but at the same time to keep the league distinct from all party politics.

In carrying out these aims, the plan of action is partly educational and partly political. The educational part consists in circulating books and pamphlets showing the need of naval supremacy; in presenting copies of more important books to Chambers of Commerce, public libraries, and similar institutions; in reprinting and issuing selected passages from some of these books; in publishing original essays; in forming a library of reference and collecting all material bearing upon the business of the League; and in arranging a course of lectures given under the auspices of the League in the principal towns of the United Kingdom. The political part consists in preparing test questions to be put to candidates for Parliament and in arranging for public meetings in support of its aims.

The example of England was followed in 1898 by Germany. The German Navy League has one great advantage over that of England—it has the strong support of the Government. The enthusiasm of the Emperor has been a powerful factor in developing naval sentiment in Germany, and the agitation has been so widespread and well organized that the results have been phenomenal. The “British Navy League Journal,” in discussing this rapid growth, said:

“One can acquire an adequate conception of the activity of the German League by learning that, at its offices at Berlin, 40 men are employed in winter and 30 in summer; that, every day, about 300 letters and 150 parcels are posted; that the conferences held by its propagandists throughout Germany reach the enormous figure of 3,000; that 5,000 microscopic views have been exhibited in various railway stations in the Empire, and that even restaurants and bars have been opened where the attendants are dressed as sailors, and the walls hung only with pictures relating to maritime subjects. The League has laid even jewelry under contribution for its propaganda. Special articles of jewelry have been made specially for the league; *i. e.*, scarf-pins, trinkets, earrings, bracelets, and necklaces have been sold in quantities by German jewelers, who pay the League a percentage on the right of reproduction.

“And thus, even to the very head of the great Continental Empire, the people—who have never seen the sea-coast, who, till a few years ago, had never dreamed of great naval power for Germany—now speak with enthusiasm and assurance of battle-ships and cruisers, of military and naval manœuvres, both of which they follow with equal interest, and pride themselves as a nation on their great maritime power, which is to be the strongest bulwark of a still ‘Greater Germany.’

"The German Navy League can, therefore, fully claim to have accomplished its object; to the state is due the credit of having created a powerful fleet; to the League the credit of having increased that power and of having rendered it national."

France, Spain, and Italy have organized Navy Leagues, the last-named having, in addition, formed an alliance with the League of Germany to promote the common object of "the development of maritime commerce and the increase of the naval strength of the two countries in order to contribute to the maintenance of universal peace." The constitution of these Leagues is similar to those of England and Germany, but in some cases the aims are enlarged to include such kindred matters as the development of the merchant marine, the increase of submarine telegraph communications, the encouragement of fisheries, the diffusion of maritime sports, the building of ship canals, and the commemoration of great naval anniversaries. In France, the League receives the active support of the Government, and all officers and men of the navy are authorized to join the same and to further its interests.

The great barrier to the success of a Navy League in the United States, if this League is to be modelled after those of European countries, lies in the fact that the navy is practically debarred from participation in public affairs. With the army it is different. The bond between generalship and statesmanship is strong. The army has time and again furnished a Chief Executive to the nation, and the soldier has always been powerful in public councils. But the sailor is an exile, often on distant seas, and his spokesmen are not of his own cloth. There has been no Beresford, as in England, no Aube, as in France, no von Tirpitz, as in Germany,—men to whose title of Admiral might be added that of Naval Counsellor, whose voices have been heard, not only on the quarter-deck, but also in the halls of legislation.

In England, there has arisen a class of writers, who, if they are not equipped for grappling with purely technical matters, are constantly discussing, in their contributions to the press, questions of naval policy and administration. Among these are Sir W. Laird Clowes, Arnold White, and Archibald H. Hurd. The first-named does not hesitate to attack the types of ships designed by Sir William White, late Director of Naval Construction in the British Navy, and has called forth from the latter a series of

letters to *The Times* which have irreverently been called an *apologia*. Arnold White has started a crusade for better gunnery, and in the writings of Archibald Hurd we find such interesting captions as "The Functions of the Navy," "Distribution of the British Squadrons," and "The War Readiness of the Fleet." This school of pamphleteers has for its object a constant prodding of the Board of Admiralty, and a demand for publicity in order that weakness may be exposed rather than that excellence may be rewarded. Their campaign has led to a retort from Arnold Forster, Secretary to the Admiralty, who says that the British Navy has two classes of enemy—those who say that the navy is all wrong, all rotten, and not to be depended upon in time of war; and another class, more numerous and more dangerous, who say that the navy is all right, and that no one need trouble his head about it.

Possibly the naval critics in our own country come under what Arnold Foster considers the more dangerous class, for a spirit of optimism pervades their contributions to the public prints and superlatives are common. This is to be expected in a young and growing country and is only a sign of the buoyancy of our national spirit, which recognizes that we are destined to be great. The fact that, in the Spanish-American War, we won a quick and decisive victory over a vastly inferior foe has led to the false notion that we are invulnerable, and in the resulting jubilation we have lost sight of another fact, namely, that a sudden development of naval strength is impossible; that we need a continuity of preparation, including, as this does, a well-ordered increase of material and a corresponding increase in personnel. Benumbing self-complacency must give way to constant activity if naval expansion is to keep step with industrial and commercial progress. It has been said by a recent writer in the *National Review* that, "except in moments of great passion, democracy is apt to concentrate its interest upon internal affairs, while its statesmen live absorbed in trifles." While, as a nation, we may not have moments of great passion, it is none the less true that a strong feeling is aroused whenever the Monroe Doctrine is attacked, and the concentration of interest upon internal affairs gives way to legislative liberality in appropriations for ships and men.

The proper field for a Navy League in this country would, therefore, seem to be the maturing, through a campaign of educa-

tion, of a strong public sentiment in favor of a navy adequate to meet all the demands that the growing nation may make upon it. The navy itself has only recently been aroused to the consideration of the broad principles of a naval policy. From 1814 until 1898, peace had been maintained with European nations; and, although the Civil War and the war with Mexico called the navy into action, it was against foes that were powerless on the high seas. From 1865 to 1882 was a period of naval decay; but the small band of naval officers that survived the ruthless cutting down of their numbers struggled to keep alive the traditions of their calling, although our old wooden ships were the laughing-stock of the other nations. The Naval War College was established at Newport in 1884. From 1882 until the outbreak of the Spanish War, modern steel ship-building brought all the technical talent of the navy into close connection with the captains of industry, and the development of naval material absorbed the entire attention of the nation without a thought of the increase in trained officers and men that was a co-ordinate necessity. The industrial interests could easily secure large appropriations for ships, but the naval interests could barely extort an extra penny for men. Not until the end of the Spanish War was the necessity for a consistent naval policy made evident, and this led to the establishment of the General Board.

Captain Mahan—himself once President of the War College, and during the Spanish War a member of the Board of Strategy, the latter a forerunner of the General Board—has, in his writings upon the history of sea-power, given his fellow-countrymen a deep well of information from which all may draw. As has been said in a recent essay by Captain Bacon, of the English Navy, every one can appreciate strategic principles—they are few and patent to every laymen; “but,” he adds, “they are not strategy; strategy is the assessment of the existing conditions and the application of principles to them; the focussing of the military state, the relegation of all events and conditions to their proper perspective, and then the application of principles to movements quantitatively assessed and co-ordinated.” This definition may appear complex, but it is apparent that the duties therein outlined must fall upon the nation’s chief naval advisers; in other words, upon the Naval War College and the General Board. As time goes on, we may hope for the organization of a

General Staff, similar to that now existing in Germany, where a consolidation of naval counsellors makes for an easier and quicker "focussing of naval opinion." To the Navy League, made up as it probably will be of men who by education and association are in sympathy with the ideas and aims of the navy, and who have faith in the good judgment of its administrators, should fall the important missionary work of spreading the naval propaganda among the people at large; of creating a strong public opinion that should begin in the school-room and end with "the man in the street"; and, finally, of establishing that community of interest which makes preparation for the maritime defence of vital importance to every good American. This is a work from which the naval officer, by the very nature of his profession, is debarred. The navy welcomes criticism, but it will be well to bear in mind Sir William White's closing words in his reply to the English pamphleteers:

"Lack of confidence and unrest are injurious factors in public opinion, and they act and react on responsible officials; critics should be both mentally endowed and educationally equipped to justify authoritative statements on abstruse subjects."

If we are careful to exclude such methods as do not appear to be in harmony with the spirit of our institutions, it is not difficult, from the considerations above enumerated, to outline a general scheme of educational work for a Navy League, after an analysis of the practice in European countries. The more important duties may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Conferences with superintendents of public instruction, principals of schools and other educators, in order to arrange a course of instruction by means of prize offers, etc., that will awaken a lively interest in the navy, beginning with toys of the kindergarten, fashioned after naval models, and working up through the stage of sea stories and nautical adventures to that of comparative history and the influence of sea-power.

2. Co-operation with lyceums and lecture bureaus, in order to arrange for a course of lectures, under the patronage of the League, in towns and districts remote from the sea-board.

3. Printing and circulating books and pamphlets that set forth the need of a strong navy; offering prizes for original essays on naval subjects not strictly technical; presenting copies of more

important works to schools and public libraries; and furnishing the local press with naval items of contemporary interest.

4. Encouragement of the naval militia and of naval reserves.

5. Co-operation with Chambers of Commerce, ship-building interests, marine underwriters and other organizations interested in the building up of our merchant marine, and close association with all organizations that look to the betterment of the condition of American seamen.

6. Careful study of all interior waterway improvements and of proposed canal construction, with a view of emphasizing the fact that their strategic importance should have equal weight with their commercial advantages.

7. The commemoration of naval anniversaries by appropriate ceremonies and the erection of suitable monuments, statues or tablets to honor the memory of our naval heroes.

These are, in brief, the suggestions that come to us from a study of the methods of Navy Leagues in other countries. The American sense of humor is so keen that it would not permit us to follow Germany to the extent of having "restaurants where the attendants are dressed as sailors," and anything that suggests clap-trap might amuse but it would not instruct. Education is the great lever in any national movement, and American *individualism* can only be centered upon any national policy by appeals to its common sense. In entering upon this work the organization might well adopt as its motto a paraphrase of that of the Navy League of Great Britain:

"A strictly non-party organization to urge upon the people the paramount importance of an adequate navy as the best guarantee of peace."

J. H. GIBBONS.